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FIRST-YEAR LATIN.

DURING the last few years much has been said in regard to the teaching of first-year Latin. The place that it has held on the programs of educational meetings, the many articles that have appeared on the subject, and the numerous first year Latin books recently published seem to indicate that the methods now in vogue are in a measure unsatisfactory and that a better way is being sought. It is conceded that the first year of the Latin course is far the most important, as the defects noticeable during the remaining three years usually are directly due to the fact that the first year's work has not been thoroughly mastered.

In order to understand the exact measure of our deficiency, we should have a definite idea of the end to be attained. Whatever benefits are incidentally derived from the study of Latin, the main object must always be the ability to read Latin with pleasure and appreciation. How well this is accomplished in the high school can best be learned from the high-school graduate himself. Does he wish to continue the reading of Latin as a pleasurable occupation after his graduation? If he should so desire, has he, after four years of study, a mastery of the language sufficient to enable him to continue it by himself with pleasure and profit? We must admit that few indeed have either the desire or the ability. At the end of four years the average high-school graduate reads Latin only laboriously with constant reference to the lexicon; the effort required to arrive at the meaning too often preventing the pleasure that should be derived from the contents and the beauties of the literature. Cæsar, Cicero, and Vergil, each in turn, have been toiled through with infinite pains. Even in the third and fourth years the pupil is often nearly helpless without the grammar on the one hand and the lexicon on the other. Both these always have an important function, but their legitimate use at this stage, and indeed at any stage, is not the consulting of paradigms and rules that should have been learned, nor the looking up of words already encountered many times. The inability of the average high-school graduate to read Latin with the readiness that

would enable him to derive the desired pleasure and profit from the literature must be acknowledged. The cause of this inability lies in the first year's work.

The pupil usually finds the first year of the study of Latin a period of sore tribulation, if not of tears. The universal testimony shows that Latin is the most difficult study in the first year of the high-school course. That Latin is difficult cannot be denied, and unfortunately it cannot be remedied. Whatever method is employed in the teaching, it is and must always be a difficult language. Nor is the experience of the child in the lower grades usually such as to prepare him to cope successfully with an exceptionally difficult study. Accustomed as he is to the careful supervision, the short lessons, the much drill on each new point, the frequent and thorough reviews of intermediate and grammar grades, he comes to the high school, where amid widely different methods of study and discipline he is expected in nine or ten months to master a vocabulary of two or three hundred foreign words, and to accustom himself to the strange fantasies of a much-inflected language, where each noun has many different forms, each with its own peculiar significance in the sentence; where the same ending may mean different things in different words, and in the same word in different sentences; where the same meaning is expressed by different endings in different words; where adjectives vary their form according to the word with which they are used; where voice, mode, tense, person, and number of verbs are indicated by a bewildering variety of modifications and terminations. All these various forms must be so thoroughly learned that he cannot only recognize and interpret them at a glance, but use them correctly. Add to this the difficulties of Latin syntax, whose many unusual and idiomatic constructions must be thoroughly mastered, and we have a colossal task indeed for children who have found it not easy to master in four or five years the incomparably simpler English grammar! Furthermore, all this formidable array of difficulties is presented so rapidly as to violate the most fundamental principles of pedagogy and common-sense. And Latin is only one of four subjects in the first year of the high-school course! It is no wonder that many children become discouraged and wish to drop the Latin. It is no wonder that they go down by platoons before a searching fire of ques-

tions that expects them to learn more new things in one study in one year than they have probably learned in any one year in all the studies of the curriculum put together. The only wonder is that more do not fail.

The fittest who survive this ordeal of the first-year work are necessarily many of them in various stages of bewilderment and confusion. The best of them are hardly in a condition to enjoy and appreciate the classics. They can and do read them, if that by courtesy can be called reading which consists in laboriously puzzling through a sentence word by word, with one finger between the leaves of the vocabulary, another at the notes, and a grammar open with marks conveniently placed at paradigms and rules; if those can be said to read the classics, who stop with the complaint, "I cannot get those words in," or "I translated it last night, but I have forgotten how I had it!" This is not the pupil's fault, nor is it the fault of the teacher. It is due to a system that requires the child to attempt the impossible, the complete mastery of what is known as first-year Latin in one year or less. A system that compels him to undertake to read Cæsar before it has been possible for him thoroughly to learn, digest, and assimilate a mass of mental pabulum that he has been compelled to swallow in a few short months. It is no wonder if mental indigestion follows such an outrage upon nature's laws. We have a way of explaining the fact that so large a proportion of those who begin Latin fail to pass the first year's work by saying that "some children cannot learn Latin," or that they are "poorly prepared in English grammar," when the fact is that they do not have the opportunity to show whether they can learn a reasonable amount of Latin in a reasonable time.

Latin can be taught in such a way that it shall cease to be a bug-bear. Make two or three roses of different sizes and colors the subject of the first lesson, with the help of these the pupils from easy Latin sentences will readily discover for themselves the meaning of the Latin words, *rosa, magna, pulchra, alba, non, est, ubi*, etc. They will be delighted to find that at the end of the first lesson they can themselves ask and answer questions in Latin. Nor will their enthusiasm abate as by easy steps plurals, agreement of adjective and verb, and different case forms are introduced. Even the dull

pupils will give sentences of their own with fair accuracy and unflagging interest. But this is slow work, and the iron hand of the educational system is heavy. At this rate it will be impossible in thirty or forty weeks to cover the required ground. We must hasten, new forms must be introduced before the old are thoroughly familiar, new words before the old are well learned, new constructions before the old are so thoroughly understood as to be used readily and accurately. Difficulties multiply and again we are struggling in the same old familiar slough of despond.

While it is possible to teach Latin in such a way that even the dullards will learn much, that all will enjoy it, and that no larger a proportion will fail than in other studies, yet it seems impossible to do this and prepare the average pupil in one year to read Cæsar with pleasure and appreciation. As well expect children in interior China, who have never heard a word of English outside the classroom, and who are absolutely ignorant of our customs and civilization, to prepare themselves in one year to read with appreciation Macaulay's *History*, then Burke's speeches, then *Paradise Lost*! Granting that with the aid of dictionary and grammar they can plod through them at the rate of ten or fifteen lines a day (increased perhaps to fifty lines the fourth year), what appreciation will they have of these masterpieces of literature? There are teachers who begin the study of Latin with the first sentence of Cæsar's *Gallic War*. Fancy introducing our little Chinese boys to English by showing them the first sentence in Macaulay's *History*! In Germany the boys study Latin three or four years before beginning Cæsar, with the result that they can really read and enjoy the classics. If the only object of the study of Latin is to drag the hapless child through a certain amount of classical Latin in the shortest possible time, then perhaps the sooner the process is begun the better. But if the object is to develop the power to understand and enjoy in the original the beauties and the truths of classical literature, then surely the first steps must be simple and natural, and as carefully graded and thoroughly learned as the first steps in arithmetic or English grammar. There should be much reading of easy Latin, not a few sentences illustrative of each grammatical principle, but many simple stories and descriptions through the medium of which the grammati-

cal principles may be so gradually introduced as to be thoroughly assimilated and made the pupil's own.

There is at present a notable lack of such material available in this country, but surely we have men wise enough to furnish it for us as it has been furnished in Germany. There is also an old-fashioned prejudice against any Latin not strictly classical, regardless of the fact that Latin authors wrote for mature minds, never for children. Is it not a little absurd to fear that the omnivorous little readers who have free rein in our public libraries, and who often eagerly devour story books scarcely "classical" at the rate of two or three a week, may perhaps have their literary taste corrupted by stories written in Latin by learned men? Granting that the modern Latin lacks somewhat the classical flavor, may it not be less of an evil for beginners than classical Latin much too difficult for them?

Latin is a hard language, and natural laws teach us that the only way to accomplish a difficult task well and without injurious fatigue is by easy stages. But unfortunately that is the one thing we are not allowed to do with Latin in our high schools. The continually increasing demands of college requirements, which must be met by the high school, leaves us no choice in the matter. To prepare for college in four years the children must begin to read Cæsar or Latin of equal difficulty at the end of the first year or earlier. The high school cannot easily increase its course to five years. In many schools it hardly seems practicable to begin Latin in the grammar grades. The stern logic of events seems then to make it necessary to crowd more and more work into the four years. The satisfactory solution of the problem of first-year Latin would necessitate changes so far-reaching that it must be left to wiser heads than mine. In the meantime, the fact remains that the child's capacity is not so elastic as is the classical curriculum, and the process of accommodating him to the increasing demands is difficult, alike for teacher and pupil.

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